

The Essence of the Road to Serfdom (in Cartoons!)

Friday, August 7, 2015



F. A. Hayek

Collectivism

F. A. Hayek

In 1944, F.A. Hayek's *Road to Serfdom* rocked the English-speaking world. The book argued that there can be no political or civil liberty without economic liberty as a first principle. Every step away from economic liberty takes us closer to authoritarian control over the whole of society. With central control comes corruption, servitude, and relative

impoverishment. The difference between the Reds and Browns, Hayek argued, matters in theory but not in practice: both paths lead to serfdom.

This argument shocked a generation of intellectuals who — very much like now — refuse to consider the integral relationship between liberty generally and freedom in the economic realm.

The timing of the book is significant. The world had been at war. Even countries with relatively free economies turned to economic planning and political centralization for the duration. Hayek regarded this path as deeply dangerous, one that threatened to convert free nations into the very thing they were supposedly fighting.

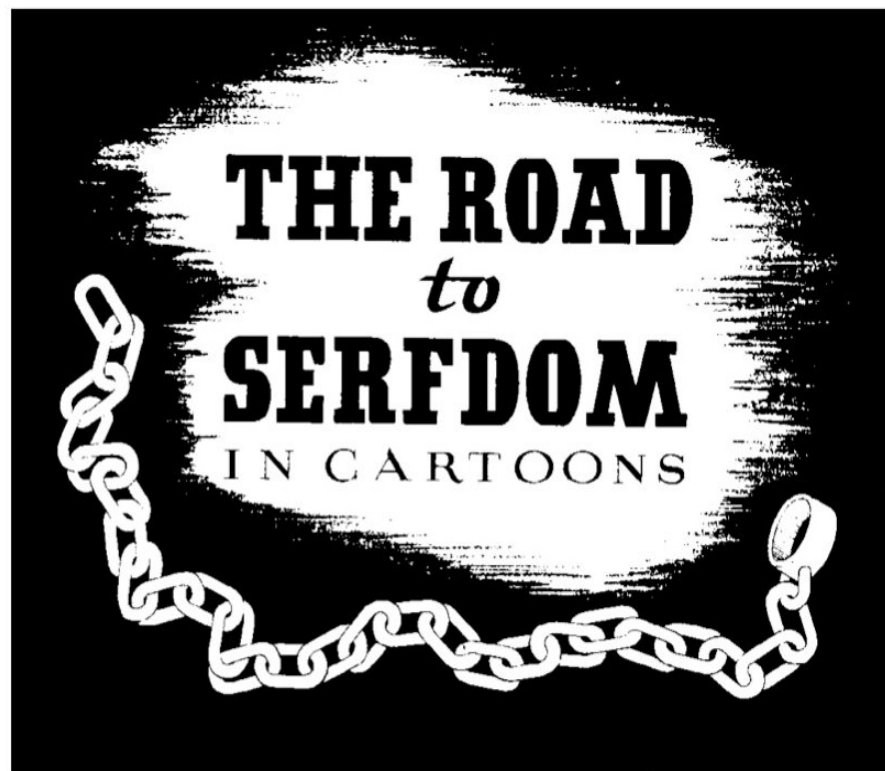
Popular wisdom regards this book as a warning against socialism, which is true enough, but a closer look reveals something striking: its primary warning concerns not Soviet-style socialism but rather the fascist form that was then sweeping Europe. Hayek sought to show that fascist forms of economic organization were not peculiar to the "German mind" or limited to rarified times and places but rather represent a grave danger to the whole world.

In 1945, the Readers Digest released a masterful reduction of the book for a popular audience. The Foundation for Economic Education has made this reduction available online in [HTML](#) and in [PDF](#).

In addition, a magazine called *Look*, distributed by General Motors, released a much-reduced version of Hayek's argument in the form of cartoons. It tells the dramatic story of a society dealing with economic decline in wartime turning to

unworkable political fixes, authoritarianism, and eventual control of the whole of economic life. It's a chilling presentation.

The Foundation for Economic Education is happy to present this work to a new generation. The dangers about which Hayek warned are ever present.



Originally published in *Look* magazine

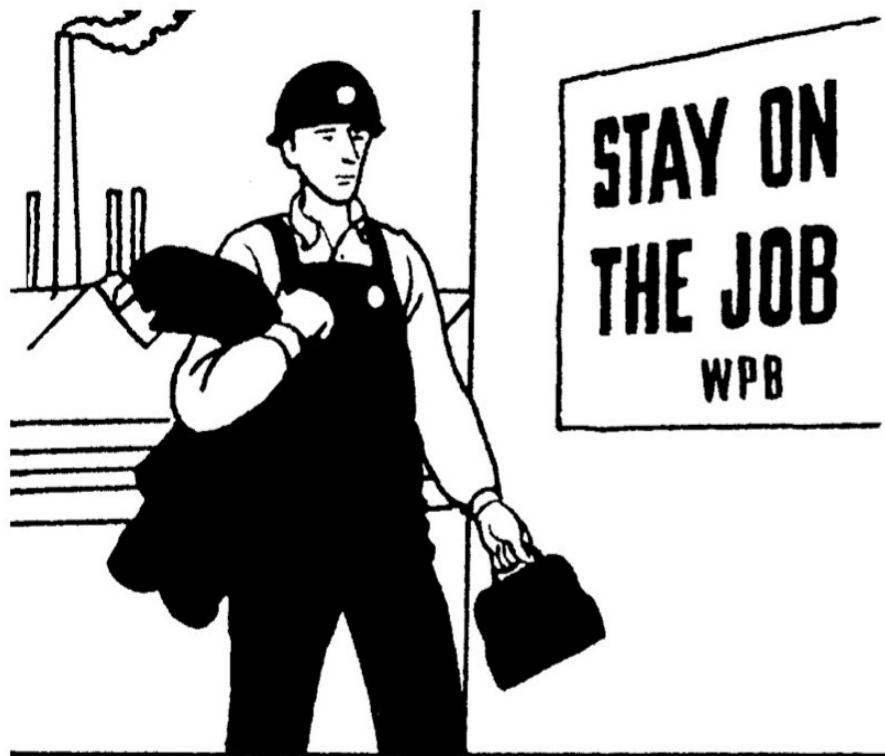
Reproduced from a booklet published by
General Motors, Detroit, in the 'Thought Starter' series (no. 118)

T H E R O A D T O S E R F D O M

1

War forces "national planning"

To permit total mobilization of your country's economy, you gladly surrender many freedoms. You know regimentation was forced by your country's enemies.



2

Many want "planning" to stay . . .

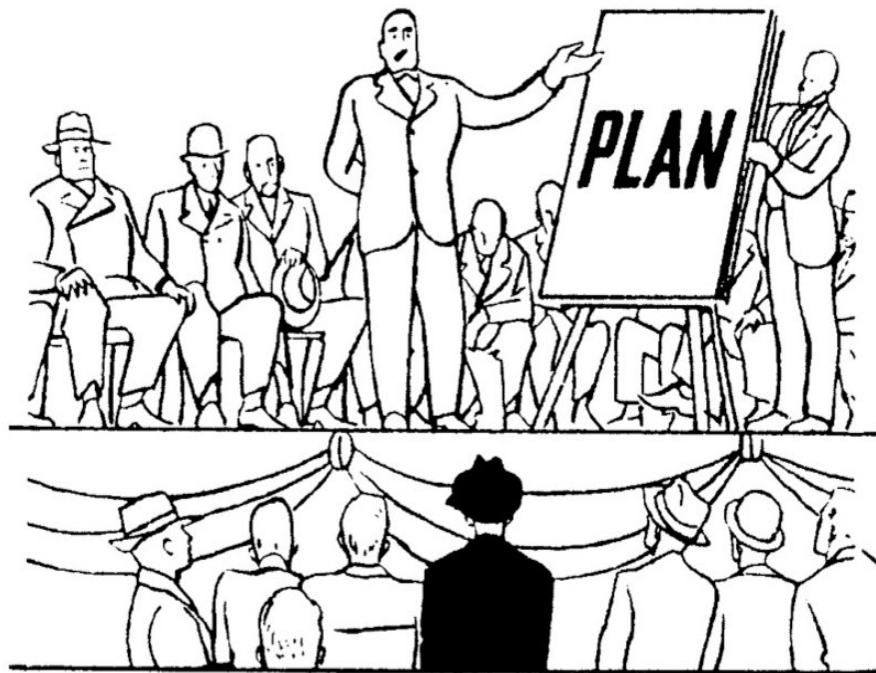
Arguments for a "peace production board" are heard before the war ends. Wartime "planners" who want to stay in power, encourage the idea.



3

The "Planners" promise Utopias

A rosy plan for farmers goes well in rural areas, a plan for industrial workers is popular in cities—and so on. Many new "planners" are elected to office

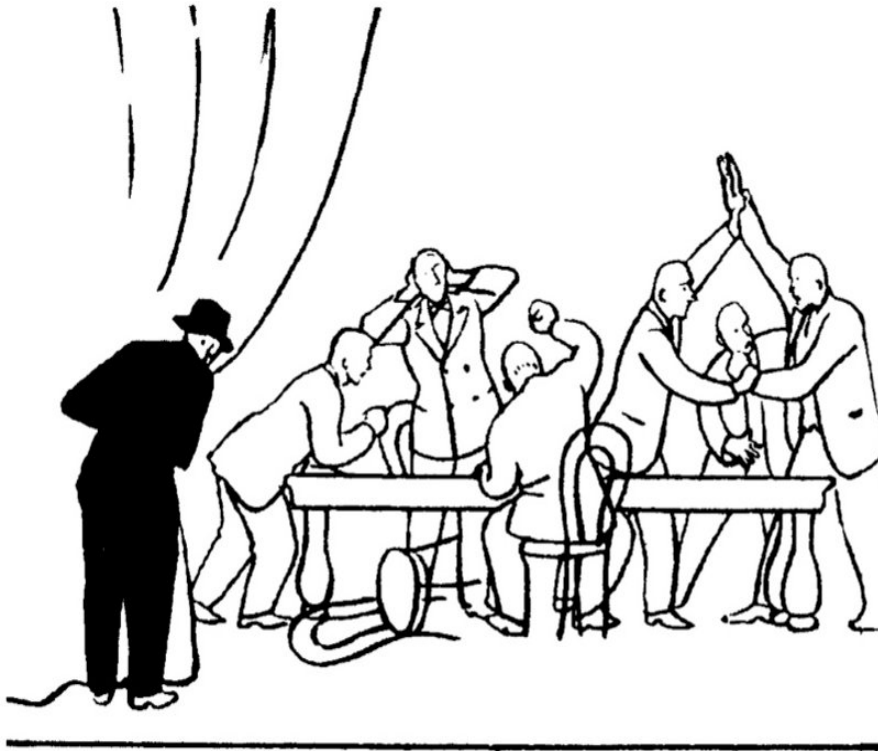


T H E R O A D T O S E R F D O M

4

but they can't agree on ONE Utopia

With peace, a new legislature meets;
but "win the war" unity is gone. The
"planners" nearly come to blows. Each
has his own pet plan, won't budge.



T H E R O A D T O S E R F D O M

5

And citizens can't agree either

When the "planners" finally patch up
a temporary plan months later, citizens

in turn disagree. What the farmer likes, the factory worker doesn't like.



T H E R O A D T O S E R F D O M

6

"Planners" hate to force agreement . . .

Most "national planners" are well-meaning idealists, balk at any use of force. They hope for some miracle of public agreement as to their patchwork plan.



T H E R O A D T O S E R F D O M

7

They try to "sell" the plan to all . . .

In an unsuccessful effort to educate people to uniform views, "planners" establish a giant propaganda machine —*which coming dictator will find handy.*





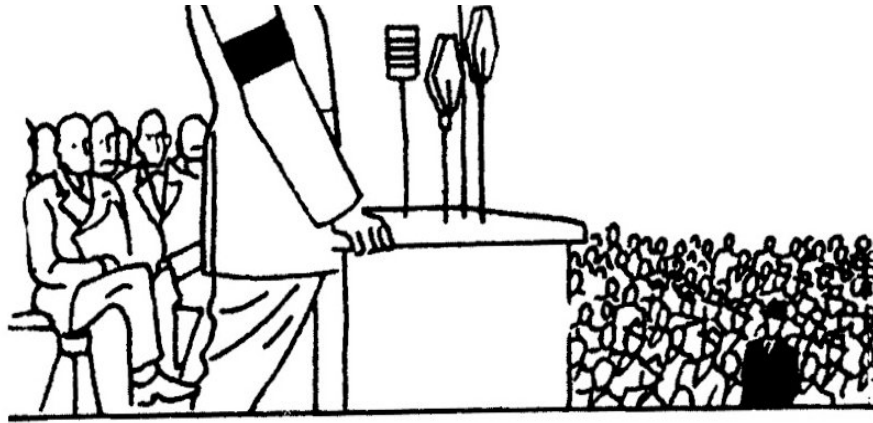
T H E R O A D T O S E R F D O M

8

The gullible do find agreement

Meanwhile, growing national confusion leads to protest meetings. The least educated—thrilled and convinced by fiery oratory, form a party.



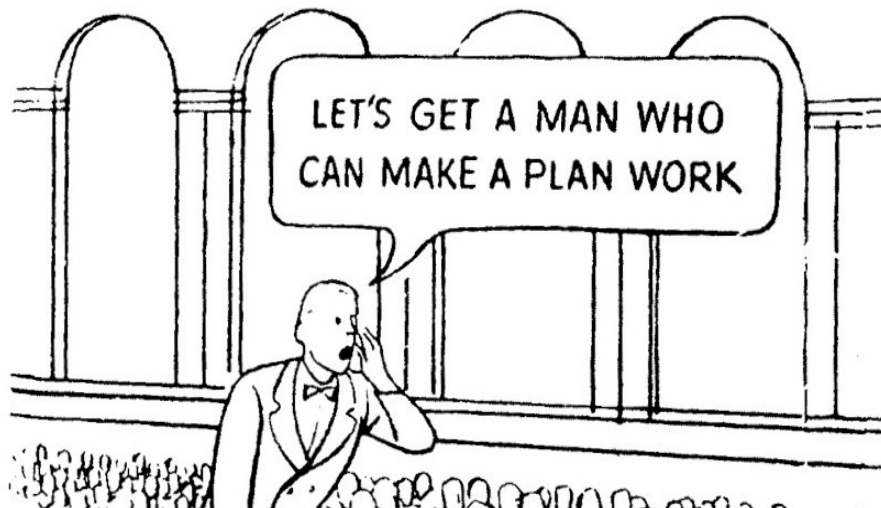


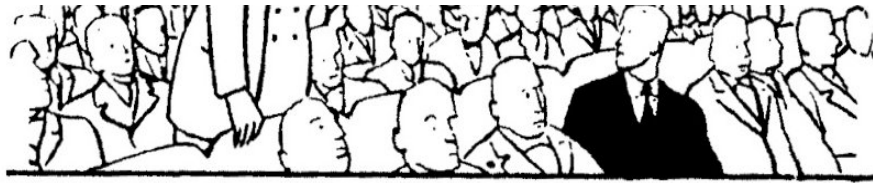
T H E R O A D T O S E R F D O M

9

Confidence in "planners" fades

The more that the "planners" improvise,
the greater the disturbance to normal
business. Everybody suffers. People now
feel—rightly—that "planners" *can't* get
things done!



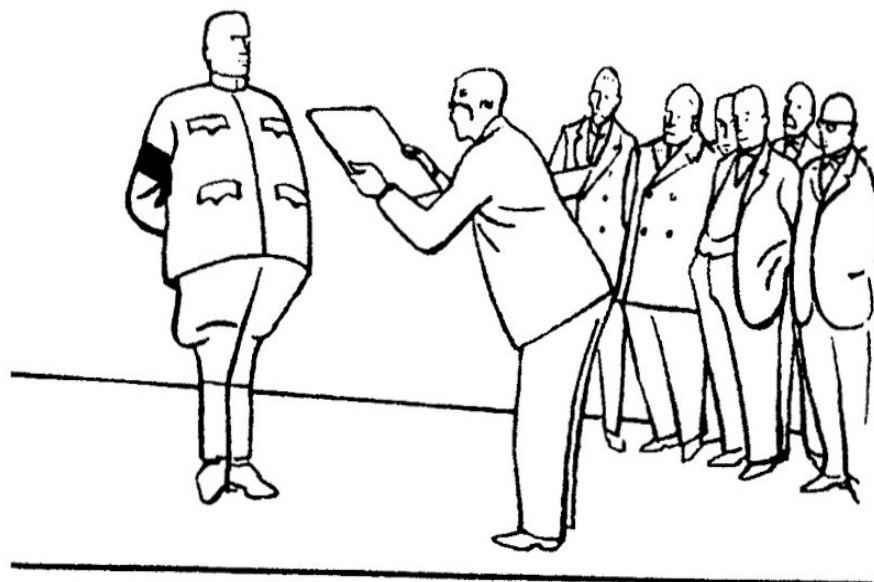


T H E R O A D T O S E R F D O M

10

The "strong man" is given power . . .

In desperation, "planners" authorize the new party leader to hammer out a plan and force its obedience. Later, they'll dispense with him—or so *they think*.



11

The party takes over the country . . .

By now, confusion is so great that obedience to the new leader must be obtained at all costs. Maybe you join the party yourself to aid national unity.



12

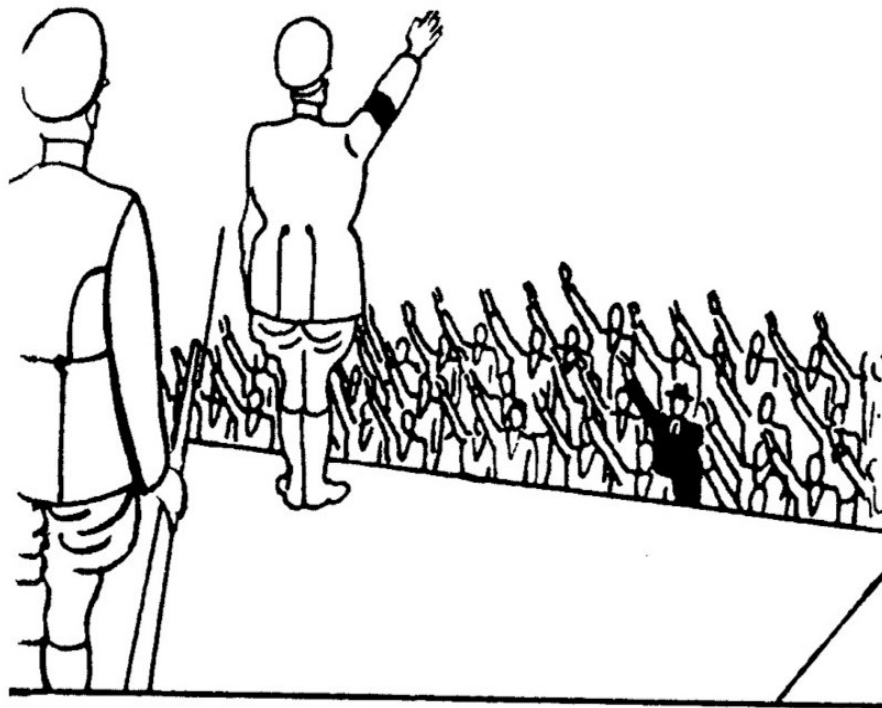
A negative aim welds party unity . . .

Early step of all dictators is to inflame the majority in common cause against some scapegoat minority. In Germany, the negative aim was *Anti-Semitism*.



No one opposes the leader's plan . . .

It would be suicide; new secret police are ruthless. Ability to force obedience always becomes the No. 1 virtue in the "planned state." Now *all* freedom is gone.

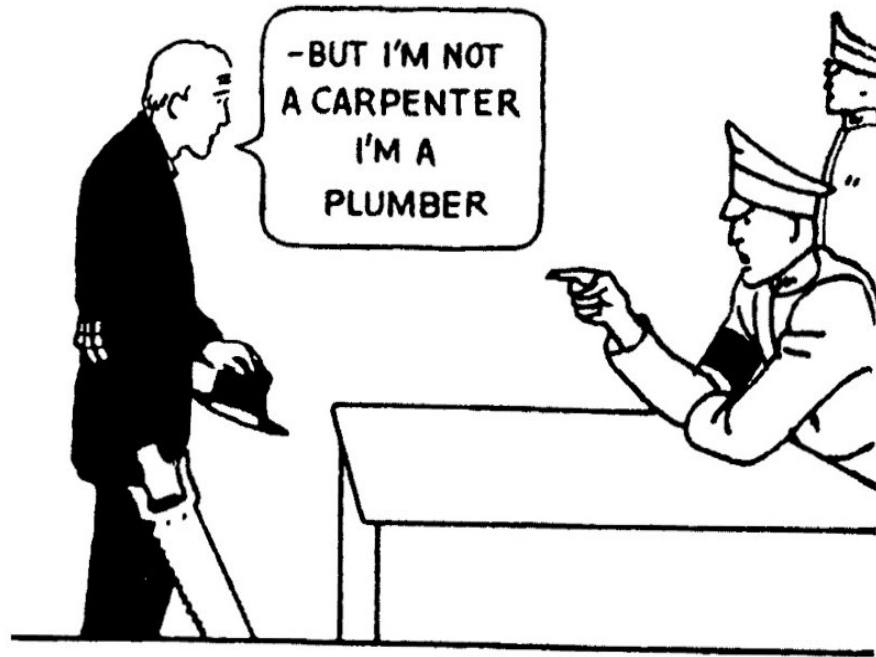


T H E R O A D T O S E R F D O M

Your profession is "planned"

The wider job choice promised by

now defunct "planners" turns out to be a tragic farce. "Planners" never have delivered, never will be able to.

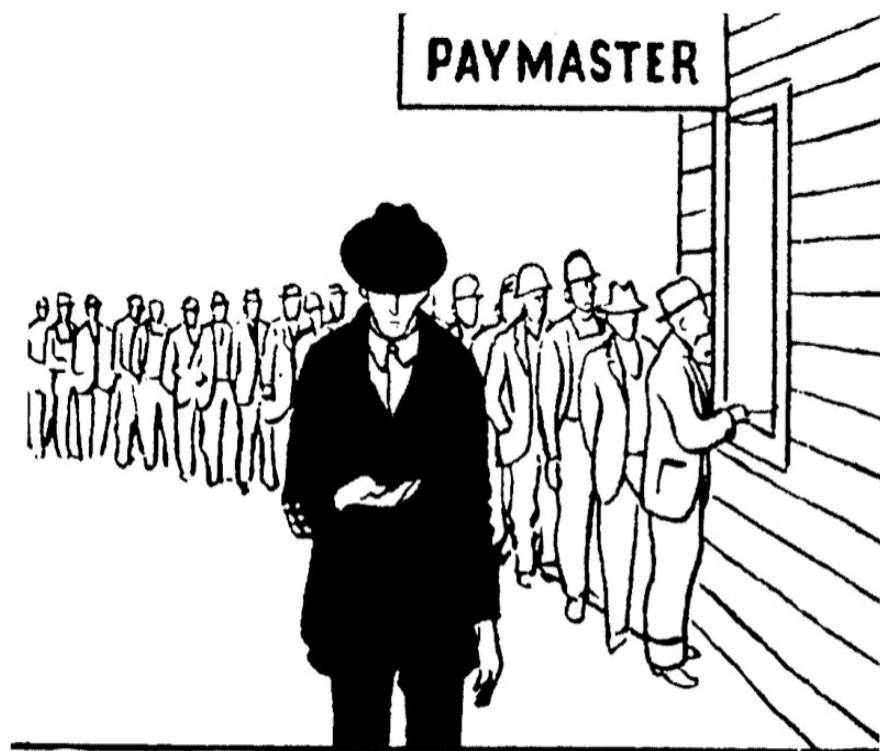


T H E R O A D T O S E R F D O M

15

Your wages are "planned"

Divisions of the wage scale must be arbitrary and rigid. Running a "planned state" from central headquarters is *clumsy, unfair, inefficient.*

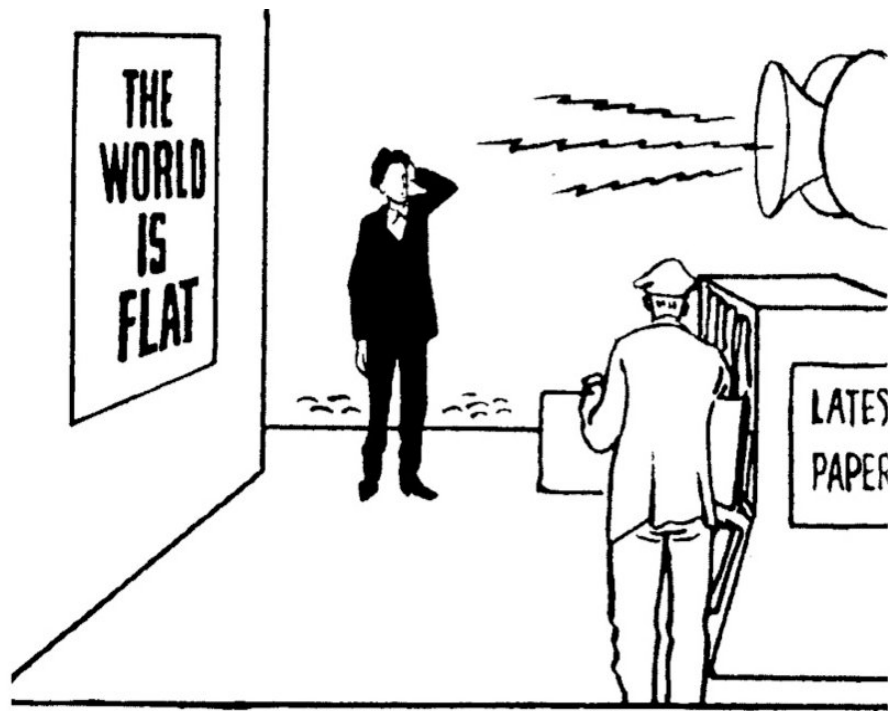


T H E R O A D T O S E R F D O M

16

Your thinking is "planned"

In the dictatorship, unintentionally
created by the planners, there is no room
for difference of opinion. Posters,
radio, press—all tell you the same lies!

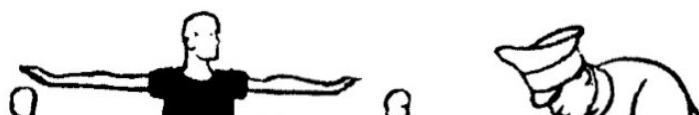


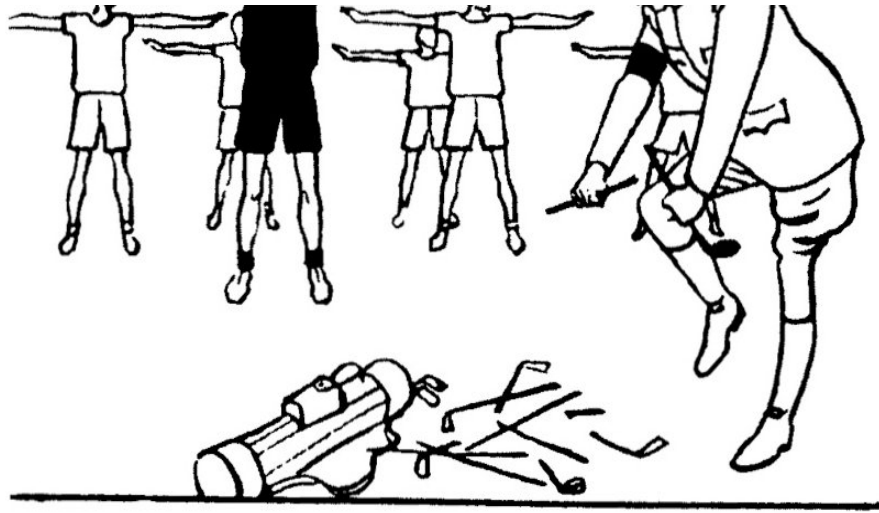
T H E R O A D T O S E R F D O M

17

Your recreation is "planned"

It is no coincidence that sports and amusements have been carefully "planned" in all regimented nations. Once started, "planners" can't stop.



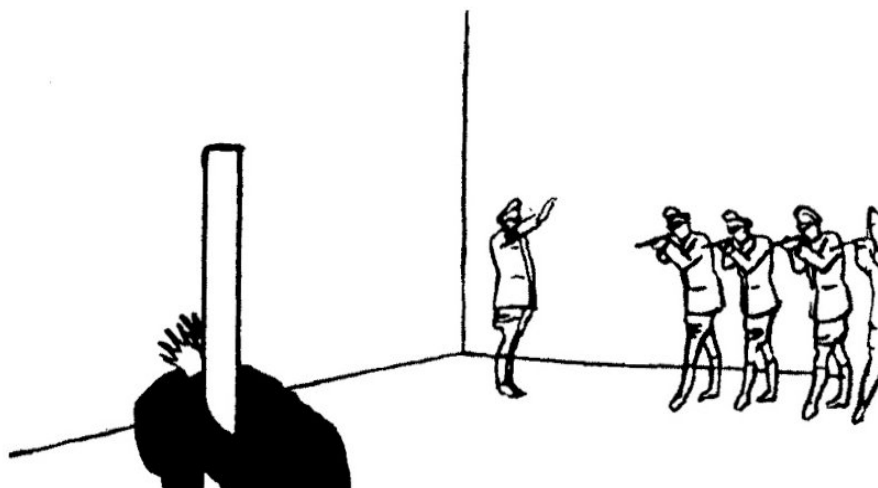


T H E R O A D T O S E R F D O M

18

Your disciplining is "planned"

If you're fired from your job, it's apt to be by a firing squad. What used to be an *error* has now become a *crime* against the state. *Thus ends the road to serfdom!*





F. A. Hayek

Friedrich Hayek (1899 – 1992) was an economist and philosopher, author of seminal works that changed intellectual history, who won the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences for his pioneering work in the theory of money and economic fluctuations and penetrating analysis of the interdependence of economic, social and institutional phenomena. He taught in Vienna, London, and Chicago.

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